

PLAYING THE PIANO.

Mr. H. A. Kelso Advances a Valuable New Theory.

Study of Anatomy, Physiology and Knowledge of Acoustics and Psychology Necessary for a Thorough Mastery of the Piano.

[Special Chicago Letter.]
H. A. Kelso, of Handel hall, Chicago, presents a new theory of piano playing based upon principles of anatomy, physiology, acoustics and psychology, and in an exhaustive article which he has published on the subject undertakes to show how piano playing may be reduced to a scientific basis. He advises the study of anatomy, that the teacher may learn to develop a good "piano hand" of physiology that we may learn the fundamental causes which operate in velocity playing. We learn, he says, to avoid and successfully treat weeping sinews and muscles.

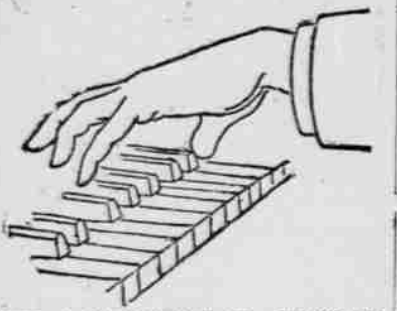


FIG. 1. MOVEMENT IN STACCATO OCTAVE PLAYING.

scian's cramp. By the understanding and application of the laws governing muscle innervation we learn to control and husband the potent force termed nervous energy. Misdirected nerve energy makes sickly piano players and unhealthy music is the result. Extracts from his article follow:

Better modes of developing the power of memorizing and of preserving untouched the pupil's individuality are the result of physical study. That we should study acoustics "goes without saying," as we cannot know too much of sound. Pedal management, tonal coloring and the science of harmony are all better understood through a knowledge of the properties of acoustics. A knowledge of the anatomy of the hand, wrist, fore and upper arm gives the student greater facility in individual muscular control. In consequence of the control thus gained, the whole arm becomes more expressive. A crisp, legible effect can best be produced by energizing the muscles of the upper arm and those of the fingers, while relaxing the wrist muscles. This is a very important point, and is simply the application of the mechanical principle of the resistance being equal to the force of the blow.

A development of the pronator muscles in the forearm renders possible a good position of the hand for playing octaves, arpeggios, scales, chords and trills with the fourth and fifth fingers. Rolling octave playing is dependent upon a separate control of the supinator and pronator muscles from those of the fingers. Speed requires the shortening of the latent period of the muscle, and this can be accomplished only by taking up the shock of the tendons. The principal muscle concerned in producing a crisp staccato effect with finger action is the extensor, as upon this muscle depends the brevity of tone. By elevating the wrist, curving the second finger and depressing it at the knuckle-joint, the finger is in the best possible position for producing the effect.

The physiology of velocity playing is a subject of great interest to the practical piano teacher. In some persons rapidity of movement is natural, the muscular tissue is very irritable and exercises of speed do not demand great effort. In others the muscles, although energetic, obey the orders of the will with considerable slowness. A great expenditure of nervous energy is necessary to obtain a rapid movement. Illustrations of these differences may be noticed in the gymnast, in fencing, boxing, rowing, walking, and in piano playing. Pflüger is authority for the

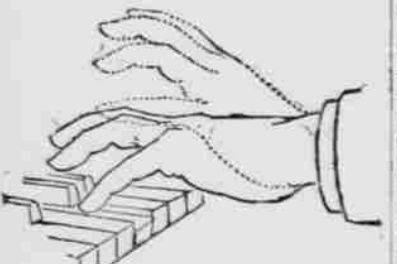


FIG. 2. MOVEMENT IN STACCATO OCTAVE PLAYING.

statement that when a nerve is stimulated by action of the will or otherwise, the stimulus received by the nerve increases in intensity as it reaches the muscle.

The three attributes of tone are force, pitch and quality. Force is dependent upon the amplitude of the vibrations. Pitch is dependent upon the vibrational number—the greater the number the higher the pitch. From these facts we deduct principles of study which are practicable to an intelligent student of piano playing. The overtones of tones sounded in the upper registers are of such great vibrational number that the ear fails to establish a definite pitch for them. Then, again, the waves of such tones are so short that they vanish almost immediately after sounding; therefore the pedal, which permits the tone to be reinforced, may be used more freely in the upper register than in the middle or lower. One tone sustained by the pedal in the middle is equal in intensity to about four in the upper register. It is possible by a delicate manipulation of the pedal to obliterate the discordant harmonies in the upper, without losing an organ point in the lower register, which sometimes of necessity must be sustained by the pedal.

A point which is of equal importance with the manner of striking is that of the manner of leaving the keys, for upon this hinges the entire system of legato octave playing. Wide skips, such as a bass note and its chord, and broad intervals either in the accompaniment or melody, may be made to sound legato without the use of the pedal, by releasing the finger from the key slowly, thus damping the tone gradually. Many beautiful effects may be produced by this use of the pedal.

All movements of the body are either

natural, habitual or necessary. In certain states of consciousness we bring into play certain muscles just as naturally as water seeks its lowest level. It is for this reason that a pupil is sometimes taught to play a passage with widely differing movements of the hand and arm by different teachers. Thus it is not infrequently happens that an instructor scatters broadcast over the land, through his pupils, peculiar mannerisms which he inherited from his ancestors. It may readily be seen that this is radically wrong, and that such would not be the case were all teaching based on philosophic principles.

In playing the piano habits will necessarily be formed, and movements based on the natural laws of expression of the body are more easily acquired and, when acquired, enable us to express musical thoughts more clearly and more forcibly than habits formed at haphazard. Technique, as applied to piano playing, is the power to express musical thoughts. This involves not only the ability to play the proper notes with correct fingers, but requires such control of the muscles and nerves that all gradations of tonal coloring may be expressed. Piano playing has been compared to an electric current—the musical thought emanates from the brain, passes through the nerves which move the muscles to be used, the finger strikes the key, the hammer strikes a wire, which in its turn produces a tone, the ear conveys the tone back to the brain, thus completing the circuit. Weak or sluggish muscles, therefore, not readily yielding themselves to the nervous stimulus flowing from the brain, will break the circuit, and the musical phrase will fall short of the musical conception.

In piano playing the purely mental intellectual phrase finds its expression in the circumscribed movements of the fingers and hand, using the knuckles or wrist as the center of motion. Passages from Bach's "Fugues and Inventions" admirably illustrate this state-

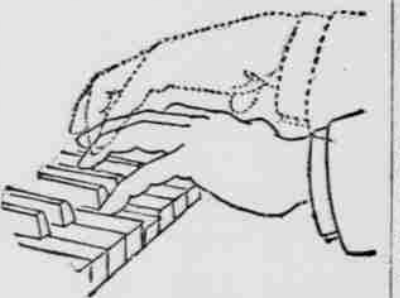


FIG. 3. MOVEMENT IN STACCATO OCTAVE PLAYING.

ment. An emotional phrase demands more freedom of movement, which the firmness of the elbow—the emotional center—and length of the forearm readily supply. Climaxes and passionate outbursts of musical feeling demand the added strength and wider swing through space of the entire arm from the vital center of the shoulder.

It is not always necessary that such broad gestures from the shoulder are used in octaves should be used in piano playing, as the energy can be brought from the shoulder, the vital center, also from the mental or emotional centers or from various combinations of the vital, mental or emotional centers without "tearing passion to tatters." This knowledge of the physiological divisions of the arm gives clear and exact reasons for the use of the upper, forearm, wrist and fingers in piano playing, a subject which has heretofore been misty, and formulates thoroughly the principles of all varieties of touch.

I consider the wrist the distributing center of the energy of the upper and forearm. It is impossible for the nervous stimulus from the shoulder to be properly conducted to the finger tips when the many tendons that pass through the wrist are tense. Almost every pupil beginning the study of the piano has some unconscious mannerism or trick peculiar to himself of using the agents of expression. Before eradicating these bad habits and building up those which are correct, a certain condition of passivity or relaxation must be achieved, just as the potter's clay must be rendered soft and plastic before it can be modeled into the desired forms. I find for this purpose the Delartean exercises known as relaxing or deactivating of inestimable value to the beginner and advanced student alike.

We can utter no many words with one breath, and when that is exhausted we must draw upon the reservoir—the air—for another supply. We can play a rapid succession of notes with a given supply of nerve energy, and when that is exhausted we must draw upon the reservoir—the brain—for another supply. This necessity of our physical nature is the basis of rhythm, and if the regularly recurring inclination to build up the waste is unheeded, health and strength will be impaired. Do not wait until a sensation of weariness is felt before renewing the energy, as we should no more play with exhausted strength than speak with exhausted breath.

While conscious technique kills expression, the very core of the true system of technical expression is embodied in Hamlet's advice to the players: "Suit the action to the word," which, freely adapted, may be made to read: "Suit the technical interpretation to the musical thought."

WILL NEXT VISIT CAMPS

War Investigation Board Leaves Washington This Afternoon.
Washington, Oct. 15.—The members of the war investigation committee did not hold a morning session but devoted the time to preparation for the tour of the army corps, which begins tomorrow.

The commission will leave Washington about 4 p. m. tomorrow, going direct to Jacksonville, Fla., where they are scheduled to arrive about noon Monday. They purpose going direct to the military camp there, where they will take the testimony of officers, men and others who can throw light upon the conduct of the war, giving special attention to complaints that appear in any form.

From Jacksonville the commission expect to visit in order Tampa, Alabama, Anniston, Huntsville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, Lexington, Ky.; Middletown, Pa., where a camp is located. Later they will go to Camp Wikoff, Long Island. It is thought the southern tour will consume from two to three weeks or possibly longer, as it is the intention of the commission to make a very thorough inquiry at all points. They will travel on a special train furnished by the Pennsylvania railroad company. The train will include a dining coach and sleeping and parlor cars for the accommodation of the entire party.

THERE ARE OBSTACLES

In the Way of Would-Be Nicaragua Canal Builders.

TWO CONCESSIONS AHEAD

And the Government Has an Eye on the Main Chance.

(Correspondence of the Associated Press.)
Managua, Nicaragua, Sept. 14.—Messrs. Edwin F. Cragin of Chicago, Edwin Ever, of the firm of R. Grace & Co., and Frank S. Washburn of New York have arrived at this capital. The object of their mission is to obtain from President Zelaya authority to attempt to organize a company and obtain the necessary capital, estimated at \$100,000,000 to construct a canal across Nicaragua. President Zelaya has placed them in conference with the acting minister of public works, in order to ascertain what they propose to accomplish and what guarantees they will offer in regard to the proposed construction of an inter-oceanic canal across the peninsula of Nicaragua. There are, however, several obstacles in the way at present that appear insuperable to the organization of a new company, with concessions that would attract and satisfy capitalists.

One of these is the fact that the "Maritime Canal Company of Nicaragua" is still alive, and that the charter is unimpaired and is to remain in force until October, 1899, according to the company, but only until October, 1898, as claimed by the government of Nicaragua. However, the company has a strong claim to many years' further existence of the life of its charter in the fact that, owing to the numerous revolutions and other disturbances in the country since the granting of the charter, in 1891, the people have been seriously unsettled by the infliction of heavy fines, forced loans, imprisonment and impressment by one political party or another into the army, this being especially so in the case of the laboring class, and causing thousands of the natives to flee to other states for refuge, so that no active work like the cutting out of a canal channel was possible in the circumstances.

Under the contract held by the company, the government of Nicaragua is obligated to keep at the canal works a police force sufficiently strong to protect the contractors, engineers and laborers and guard the machinery, edibles and supplies.

This force was maintained at the storehouses and workshops at Greytown, work on the canal was commenced, but subsequently, owing to fears of revolutionary troubles in western Nicaragua, the government called off the police at the canal for duty elsewhere and then Nicaragua's protection ended.

Even if the existing concession to the Maritime Canal Company of Nicaragua, authorized by the government of the United States, were abrogated, there comes to the front the concession granted in 1897 to the Caribbean and Pacific Transit company, limited, of Liverpool, England, for the exclusive right of steam navigation on the Rio San Juan del Norte for thirty years, with other concessions of lands, timber, etc. This company desires to control not only inter-oceanic transportation across Nicaragua, but claims the privilege, in its charter, to build and operate a system of railroad and steamboat transportation sufficient to also control the interior transportation of the country. With such privileges the English company is not likely to sell out to a new concern, even if the latter succeed in having the existing charter of the Maritime Canal company annulled.

It is not improbable, either, that the government of Nicaragua will grant a canal-construction charter or concession to any new company until the government is secured by a large sum on deposit as a guarantee, and an equally large sum in gold as a bonus together with a large percentage of the capital stock, and the insertion of clauses in the contract, placing the entire control of the company under the laws of Nicaragua and binding the company not to appeal to its national government for help in the event of any disputes between the company and the government of Nicaragua.

Tomorrow (September 15) is the seventy-third anniversary of the independence of Nicaragua and all the Central American states and their deliverance from Spanish sovereignty. The occasion is to be celebrated here by a sham battle on a hill south of this city, between a force of artillery and infantry, followed by a review by President Zelaya, his military staff and the ministers.

It is reported that President Zelaya will issue a decree on September 15 granting amnesty to thousands of Nicaraguans who have fled from their homes during the last few years, owing to political complications and from fear of imprisonment into the army during the frequent bloody revolutions in this country.

NOT LABOR VERSUS CAPITAL

But Labor Versus Labor Is What Ails the Glass Workers.

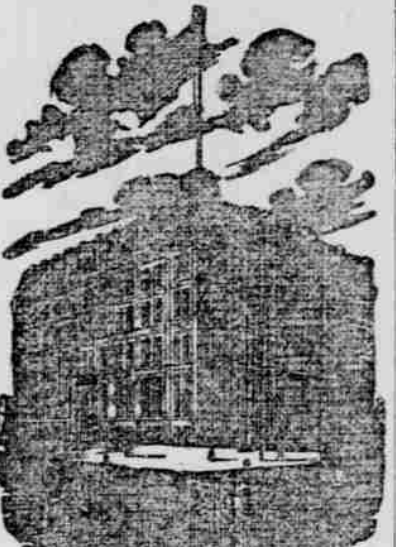
Pittsburgh, Pa., Oct. 15.—The Glass Workers' Delta fraternity, with 200 delegates, representing forty-three colleges in the United States, is celebrating its centennial here. The meeting will last several days, and many prominent men are expected to take part in the exercises, among them General Lew Wallace, Dr. John Clark Ridgway, Bishop Harbo, Bishop William E. McLarn and United States Senator Fairbanks. An elaborate program has been arranged.

Reduced Rates to Soldiers.
San Francisco, Oct. 15.—The Southern Pacific, together with the other overland routes, will put into effect today reduced fares for the benefit of soldiers traveling between San Francisco and Chicago. They will be given a first class rate of \$1.00 to the Missouri river, likewise a second class rate of \$1.00. Rates east of the river will also be reduced. Many soldiers are going home east on sick leave or furlough.

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